<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>July 24-26, 2008</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Afternoon/evening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Loon Creek – Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weather</td>
<td>Clear and sunny</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish Species</td>
<td>Westslope Cutthroat</td>
<td>Fish Caught</td>
<td>A few Cutthroat; a Steelhead smolt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Size Range</td>
<td>10-12”, occasional 15”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flies Used</td>
<td>Stimulator</td>
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<td>Stimulator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Techniques</td>
<td>Drag free float</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>If you want to find yourself in a place far away casting big dries to wild Cutthroat then this is it!</td>
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It was time for another family campout and a little bit of fishing. Tin Cup campground was our destination. It is about 30 miles of dirt road from Sunbeam near Stanley, ID. The campground sits well within the fringes of the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness on Loon Creek. The access road is a corridor allowed to remain when designating the wilderness.

The trailhead near the campground
Loon Creek is a wild Cutthroat fishery and a major tributary to the Middle Fork Salmon River which is a blue ribbon fishery. It is also spawning grounds for Chinook Salmon and I assume Steelhead. I caught an 8” Rainbow that I assume is a Steelhead Smolt waiting to make its voyage to the ocean. I hear the Cutthroat fishing can be phenomenal using big dries. That was my experience on the Middle Fork Salmon River near Dagger Falls.

Unfortunately, there was a large thunderstorm that swept across the state two days earlier that muddied up the water. It shut off power and closed all the roads into Yellow Pine due to all the mudslides caused from the fires last year. They were actually clearing a mudslide on the road on my drive in.

Nonetheless I still got to cast some large stimulators and catch a few Cuts. The evening I arrived I talked my wife into fishing for an hour or so. I took advantage of the “or so” and made it an hour and a half due to the hike. I hiked a half mile down the road to the trailhead and not far down the trail from there to make my first cast.

As I looked down into the river from the rocks I could see nothing. The water was too murky. This stream usually runs crystal clear and you can see the fish rising to flies. I cast several times into several holes with no luck. I decided just to head back to camp. On the way back I saw one more hole I wanted to try. I took off my hiking boots and slipped on my sandals and waded up the river to the hole. I made several blind casts with the same luck that I was previously having when all the sudden I saw a rise. I got real excited and found some hope.

I dropped my fly several feet above the rise and let it naturally drift down to the fish. It slowly drifted over the location of the previous rise and kept floating without a take. I repeated the same action a second time with the same result. The saying “third time is a charm” rang true in this case. I repeated my action a third time as my fly disappeared into the film. I raised my rod and felt the pressure of the fish as it dove back down into the depths of the hole. After a short tussle I found myself holding a beautiful 12” crimson bellied Cutthroat from one of Idaho’s wildest rivers.

As I was landing the fish I noticed another rise across the main current next to the cliff in some still water. I knew it would be a difficult cast and I’d be lucky to keep my fly there for four seconds before the current swept my line downstream. I walked back to the previous place I was standing where I caught my first fish. After a few casts I was able to make the cast I needed. The second fish soon dove into the depths with my fly but was soon released due to my inability to tighten all my slack line in time.

I tried a few more blind casts and decided I better start getting back. As my line drifted back within a few feet of me I noticed that a big Cut had risen and swung on my fly as I lifted my fly out of the water. I got a perfect view of his head and side as it nearly cleared the water. I made several casts in the area to try to hook him but to no avail. It made a great end to the evening and gave me hope for tomorrow realizing the water would be yet a little clearer.
The fishing remained the same throughout the weekend with a few more hookups as I fished an hour here and there. It is a beautiful stream to fish and I love being so far away with very few other fishermen.

On Friday morning I took my family on a hike down Loon Creek about 2.5 to 3 miles to where the bridge crosses the river. A few more miles and we could have made it to a nice hot spring but that wasn’t going to happen. The canyon heats up once the sun comes out. Much of the area was burned a few years ago. There were many wild flowers along the trail and mushrooms growing on all the burnt trees. We ran across a grouse on the trail that didn’t seem to be too concerned of our presence. We got very close before it started walking down the trail and eventually flew off.

My wife and kids and dog were pretty tired by the time we got back to camp. We enjoyed cooking tinfoil dinners and making smores. The mosquitos weren’t too bad and the temperatures were pleasant. There was one other group of campers that were having a small family reunion. They camp here for a week or so every year and many times have the campground to themselves. It’s a great place to get away especially if you’re a fly fisherman that wants to get away with tying on the biggest baddest bug and catch a wild Cut.
The hike down Loon Creek
The hike down Loon Creek

I think this is the first time that my dog has ever enjoyed water
Returning from the River of No Return Wilderness

My four youngest girls enjoying tent camping
The drive in and out deserves its own special mention. The drive in wasn’t too bad. We drove from Sunbeam up to Custer and on to Tin Cup. We stopped at Custer to see the museum and dredge and let the girls pan for Gold. It is all part of Yankee Fork State Park. They really enjoyed panning for Gold and actually finding a few flakes.

The drive from Tin Cup up to Pinyon Peak Lookout and on over the ridges on Beaver Creek Road was a true backcountry adventure. You felt like you were on top of the world. The road is narrow and rocky and mostly used by four wheelers but passable in a high clearance vehicle preferably four-wheel drive. The views are straight down and as far as you can see. There is one point along the ridge where you look straight down from both sides of the vehicle.

I learned something new about my wife. As I was thoroughly enjoying the moment my wife was about to skin me. She got very nervous and said she would never join me on a trip again that involved such a drive. I admit it was a thrill!

I’ve been to a lot of backcountry in Idaho and I’d have to say this rivals only a few other places of wild remoteness in a vehicle. The views from the lookout and the ridge running were truly a breathtaking experience.
Buildings at Yankee Fork State Park

Learning how to pan for Gold
Pinyon Peak Lookout (9,941’)

The view looking north from the lookout
Views along the ridge